

## What you can do to help a loved one who is experiencing delirium:

- ⇒ Speak slowly and clearly
- ⇒ Use short sentences and simple directions
- ⇒ Tell him or her that they are safe
- ⇒ Bring glasses and hearing aids
- ⇒ Inform health care provider if there are any abrupt changes in behavior that concern you
- ⇒ Bring some familiar objects from home (for example pictures)
- ⇒ Use nicknames familiar to your loved one
- ⇒ Your loved one may not recognize you, do not take this personally
- ⇒ Avoid sudden movements
- ⇒ Limit number of visitors at the same time



Department of Veterans Affairs



Has your loved one had sudden changes in thinking or behavior?

## DELIRIUM

What families need to know



## What is Delirium?

Delirium is a sudden onset of clouded thinking and abnormal behavior.

Delirium may last for hours, days or even weeks. It often appears to come and go during the day. This is because the brain is not working normally. Fortunately, delirium can be successfully treated and even prevented.

## Who is at Risk?

Anyone with a **serious illnesses** can develop delirium. However, **older adults** and those with other diseases of the brain are at highest risk.

## Delirium is different from dementia.

Dementia is a slow or gradual loss of brain function that is usually permanent.



## Other Risk Factors for Development of Delirium:

- Infections
- Dehydration
- Severe pain
- Constipation
- Alcohol, sedatives or pain killers
- Too little oxygen to the brain
- Low blood sugar, low blood sodium or other serious medical problems
- Use of certain medicines like steroids or those to treat sleep problems, pain, colds, allergies, stomach cramps or bladder problems
- Surgery
- Lack of sleep
- Being in an unfamiliar place

## Symptoms:\*\*

- Unable to recognize family members, remember the time of day or their location
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Problems paying attention
- Sudden confusion
- Short term memory loss
- Seeing or feeling things that are not there

## Symptoms Continued:

- Changes in behavior and personality; doing things way out of character
- Mood changes such as anxiety, agitation, nervousness, aggression, resisting care, quiet withdrawn mood and excessive sleepiness
- Loss of bowel and/or bladder control
- Picking at clothes or tremors

**\*\*All these symptoms may come and go during the day.**

## When Delirium develops, the Medical Team may:

- Order tests to diagnose underlying illness
- Change medications or provide other treatments
- Do things to help familiarize patient with surroundings and reduce confusion